

The Circumcision of Christ (January 1, 2012)

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.”

✘ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Her Majesty the Queen does not have a passport.

She doesn't have a passport because it is under her authority that passports are issued. That makes sense.

Faced with the story of Jesus' circumcision, however, one might wonder if God makes sense.

Consider this: It is under the direction and authority of the Lord God that Jewish males are circumcised to set the Israelites apart as His own. And now the Creator of the Universe is Himself circumcised?

We might wish to join the Blessed Virgin Mary when she questioned the angel who announced the coming conception of Christ: “How can this be?” Indeed, when we consider our Lord’s circumcision, how can this be?

It’s God’s idea to be born into the world, and He does so knowing the consequences. The Unlimited God limits Himself to a human body, and to laws and customs on earth, even those of His own institution. That God should choose to subject Himself *to Himself* is an amazing testimony to the first rule of leadership that I learned as an Army Cadet: “Lead by example.” There is no more powerful encouragement to do the right thing than when observing a leader follow his own direction, and there is no greater discouragement than when

observing a leader do the opposite of what she says to do.

And yet I stand before you this morning as a hypocrite. No matter my desire to be faithful, I can never adequately live up to the Gospel that I preach, but by no means does my necessary failure negate the truth of the Gospel. Because I am personally unfaithful and untrue does not make the faithfulness and truth of God false. In Article 26 of our Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, found on pages 708 and 709 of the Prayer Book, we are taught that the unworthiness of the Minister does not hinder the effect of the Word of God and God's Sacraments. Nothing I do or say or fail to do or say as Andrew Nussey changes God. It is not my gospel, but

God's: we are here for God, not for me or for anyone else. Our leader is the Lord.

While it is true that you and I are unable to measure up, that should be no discouragement for us. The whole point of Christmas is that due to our inability to climb a ladder to God, God has come down to us, to be with us, to be one of us. The Leader has pitched tent with His followers. We are here for God—yes—but first and foremost God is here for us. Our encouragement is in Christ who is for us who we are not; who does for us what we cannot ever do. “We are not worthy ... But thou art the same Lord.” We have our ups and downs, our good days and bad, our successes and failings—we are ever-changing, yet the Lord remains steadfast, and it is in Him we take our refuge. It is in Him we find our

clear identify when our own identity is insecure and obscure.

Now all of this is *not* to say that, following our Lord's submission to circumcision, every man must now be circumcised. That is not the point. The point, rather, is to observe that Jesus is submissive to the conditions of His humanity; that He is submissive to all things human. And this is how we often fail. My personal failings as a person and as a priest, and each and every one of our failings whatever our station in life, is *not* that we are not *godly* enough—it is that we are not *human* enough. Jesus does not retreat from His human lot. He does not hate His human life. Rather, He embraces it fully.

In our interactions with our world and the people in it, we can often act like beasts. We trample on each

other. We seek to dominate. We protect our imagined territory. We tear each other apart. It is when we descend to animalistic instincts that we forfeit the dignity of our humanity. And, on the other side of the coin, as prey faced with the foes of life, we can seek to flee and hide. In other words, we can, on the flip side, seek to be gods—gods who live over and above and separate from the human condition. Alcohol and drugs can be used to escape from reality. Building invisible emotional barriers between ourselves and others can be an attempt to sanitize our relations and preserve our separateness from others and the world.

And yet God Himself becomes a human, in the fullest sense of what that means. “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in

the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” Following the example of Christ, it is now time that we empty ourselves of all our pretensions, and rally around each other as the humans God has created us to be. As Christians and as a Church Family, we must be of the same mind, and that mind must be Christ’s.

Imagine if we all lived a common life of self-emptying, trusting that in emptying ourselves we will be filled! “[F]or it is God who is at work in you,” writes Paul, “enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” God-with-us, God-in-us: emptied of all that is

false and inhuman, it is God Himself who desires to be given the space to do His work within us from the inside-out. Do you perceive God working within you, ushering in His healing and reform in your life? Jesus, whose name means “The Lord is Salvation,” is the Name we are called to revere, and it is the Lord of Salvation with whom we are called to identify. “Salvation,” I will remind you, simply means “healing.” “By his stripes we are healed,” says the Prophet Isaiah and the Apostle Peter (Isaiah 53. 5; 1 Peter 2. 24). First foreshadowed at His circumcision, and completed on the Cross, the Lord pours out His life-blood, and is emptied, so that we may be filled with His life, so that all that is dead within us may be revived and resurrected. God’s good will for us is to enjoy the abundant human life He has given us, and

it is this freedom of life offered to us in Jesus Christ to which we must now turn and surrender.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour, power, glory, might, majesty and dominion, both now and for evermore.